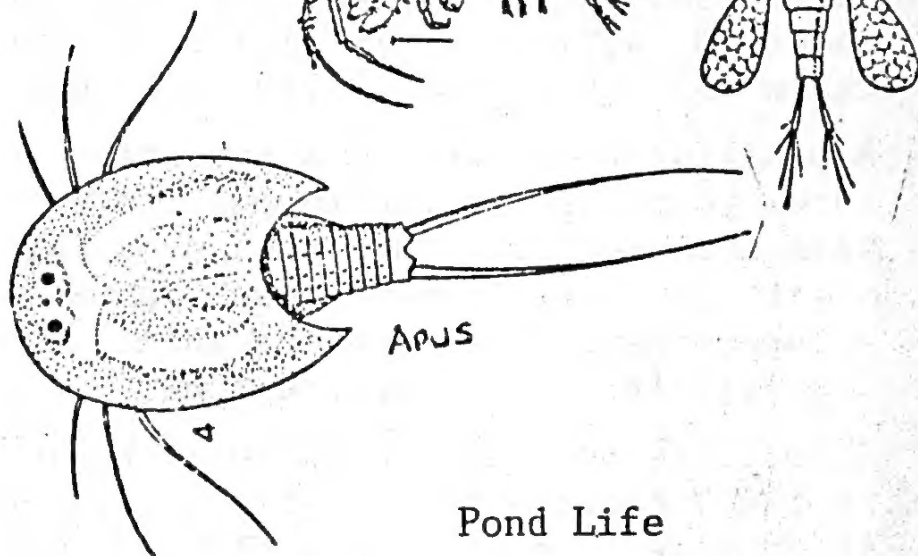


CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

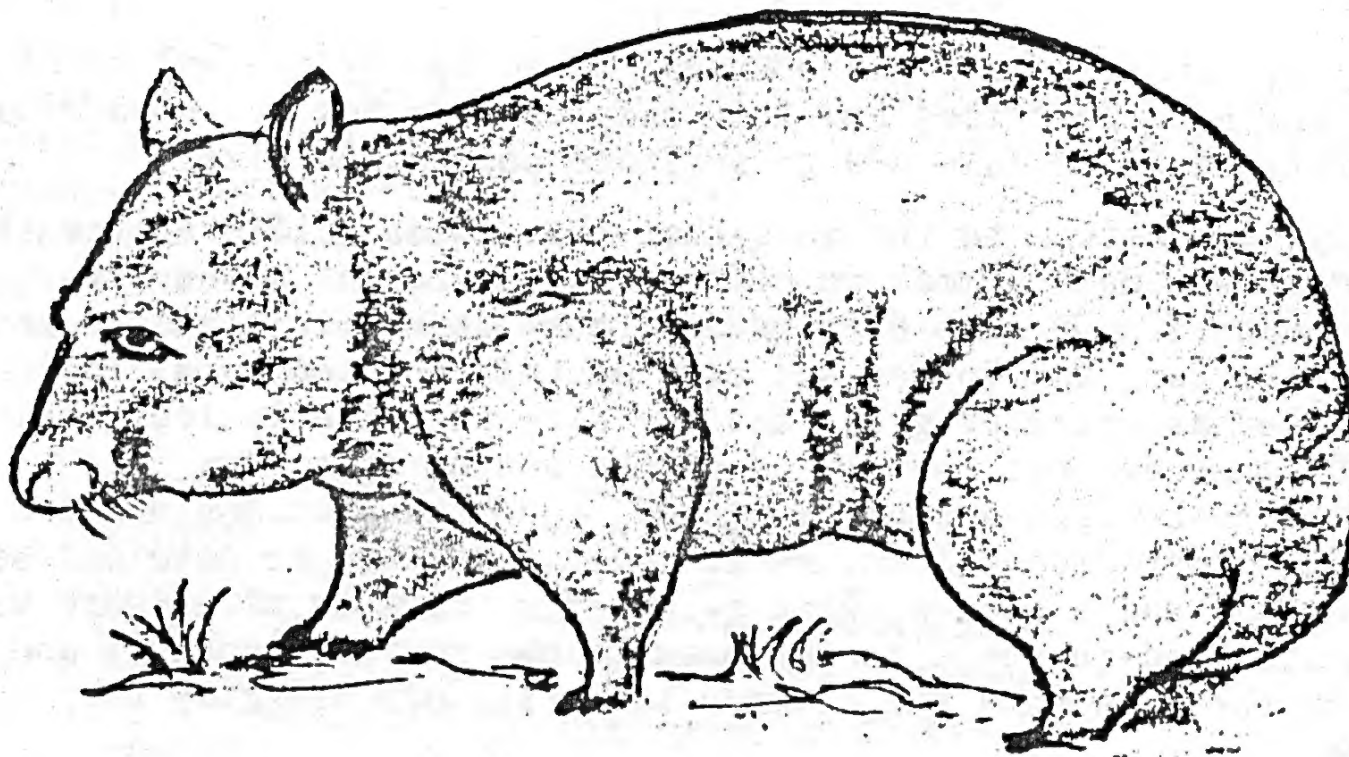
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JULY 1985

Vol 10 #6



Pond Life



Hairy-nosed Wombat
Lasiorchinus latifrons

after Cayley

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

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LONG LOST WOMBAT REDISCOVERED ?

from the "AGE" July 3 1985

An animal which has not been sighted for a period of time twice as long as that since the last Thylacine was seen may be still living in a forest near Deniliquin. The animal is a type of Hairy-nosed Wombat, *Lasiiorhinus* sp. of which only three groups are known. One group of about 30 individuals is living in a protected colony near Rockhampton, while the other group lives on or near the Nullarbor plain in S.A.

A Deniliquin man who is a part time fox hunter discovered the burrows three years ago in the Tuppal State Forest. Recent visits this year have detected fresh burrows, droppings and tracks, but as yet no sighting of the animals has been made. However hair samples taken from a burrow have confirmed the animal as being the Hairy-nosed Wombat as distinct from the Southern form.

Scientists who have so far only known the animal from a few skins held in the Victorian Museum will be delighted if they are at last able to study some live specimens of an animal which has been thought to be extinct for 100 years.

Members may recall a talk given a year or so ago by Rob Wallis of the FNCV in which he described how hair samples from fox scats were used to identify small mammals and to estimate population size.

The Hairy nose refers to the fact that this animal differs from the more common southern animal in not having an area of naked skin between the nostrils. It also differs from that animal in having softer, rather silky fur, and longer and more acutely pointed ears. The colour is described as grizzled-grey, and the size is slightly less, being about 90 cm as against the 110 cm of the southern genus.

A South Australian authority, Angas, reported that *Lasiiorhinus* also had a milder disposition, as it never attempted to bite and said that the eye "had a good-natured twinkle". Its mode of defence was to turn its hind-quarters to the enemy, then to turn suddenly and charge at the legs with the obvious intention of upsetting the intruder.

According to Troughton, the Deniliquin population had been wiped out by 1909 as part of a campaign against rabbits which used wombat burrows. He claims that the animal was once plentiful in south-western New South Wales and Victoria before attempts were made to control the rabbits by destroying wombat burrows

Jolly Puddlers Operated at Heathcote

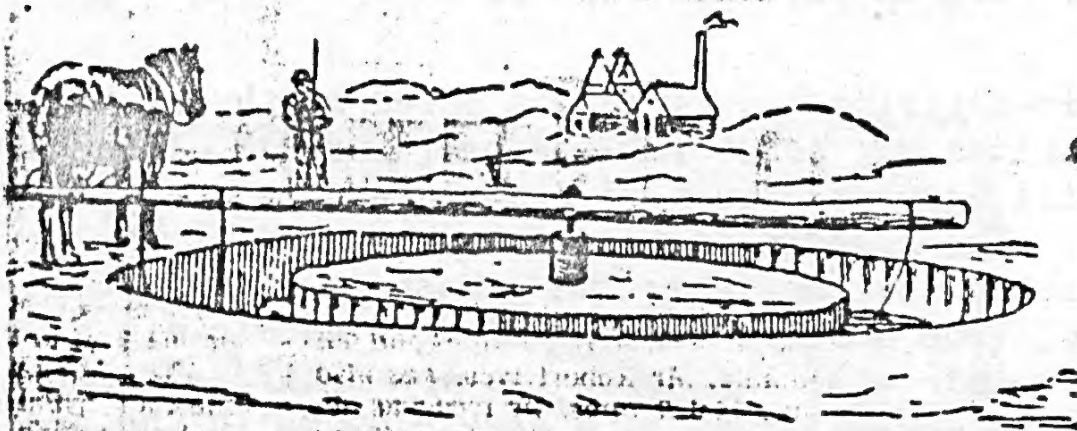
by Ed.

A recent article by John Lahey in the AGE described the finding of a puddling machine in the bush near Heathcote, dating from about 1860. According to Dr Bill Russell, head of the Dept. of Minerals and Energy who visited the site, the machine is the most intact of the 5000-odd which were recorded in Victoria at the peak period of about 1858. He is seeking special protection for the site, the location of which is being kept secret for the present.

I thought that the article would be of interest to members who have visited similar puddlers in the bush at Vaughn, possibly on one of the club walks through the area. Several members will recall inspecting at least one of these devices, but may not have realised at the time how privileged we were, or how fortunate we are to have well-preserved remains in the bush close to home. In view of the stress being laid on the significance of the Heathcote find, perhaps more should be done to ensure the preservation of our local specimens.

A puddling machine is a trough cut in the shape of a ring in raised ground and lined with close-fitting slabs. The centre is solid earth containing a pivot, to which a wooden arm is attached. A horse harnessed to one end of this arm walks in a circle, and as it does so, it drags two harrows around the trough.

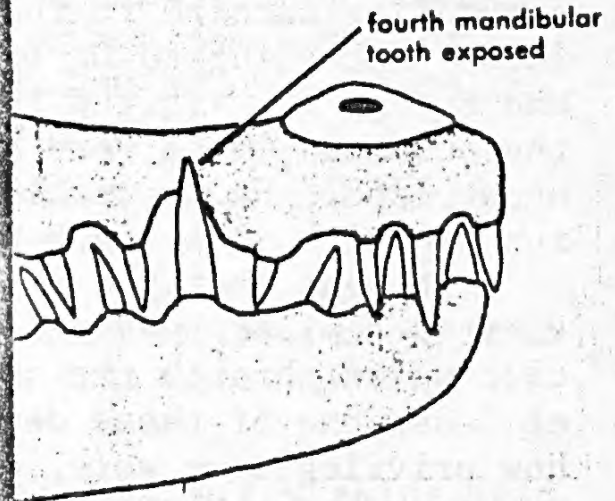
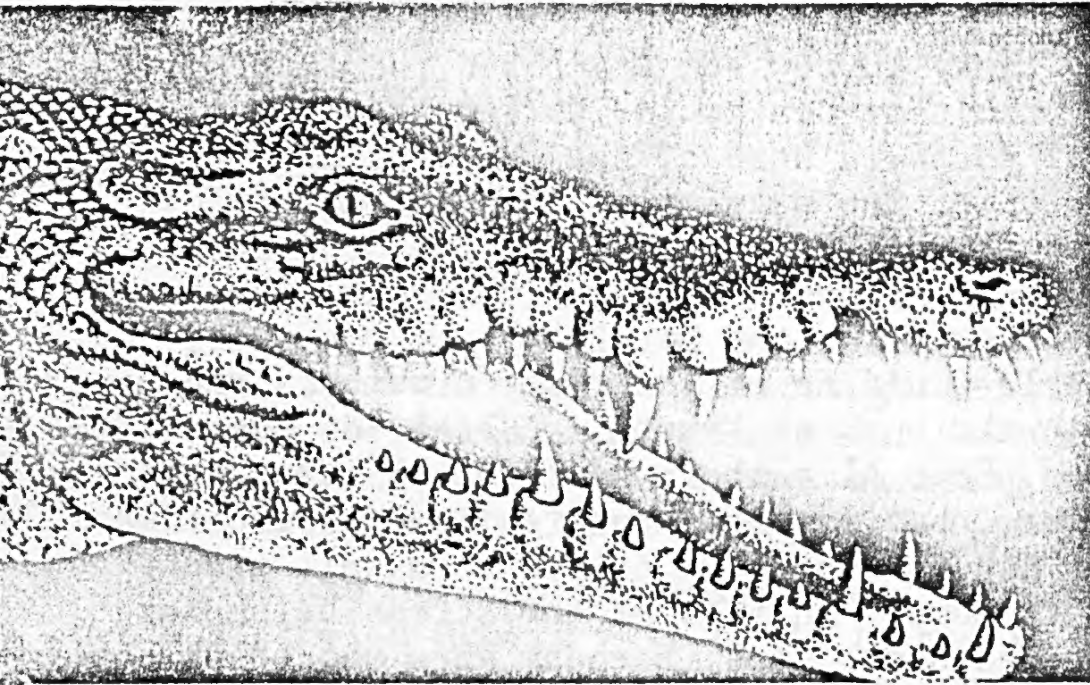
The harrows puddle clay into a sludge which is run off at intervals through an outlet. Fresh water is added until the stuff in the trough is clean enough to be sluiced to wash away the spoil and leave the gold. (At least that was the theory).



A drawing of a puddling machine being driven by horse-power.

CROCODILES

by Terry Collins

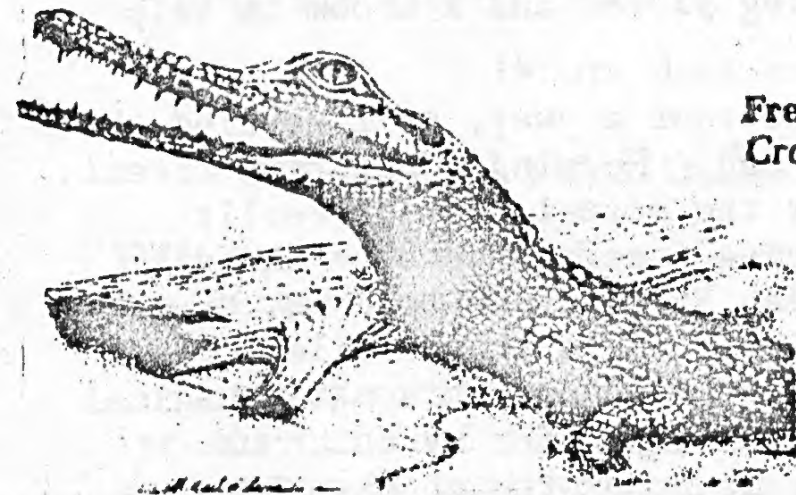


Crocodile .

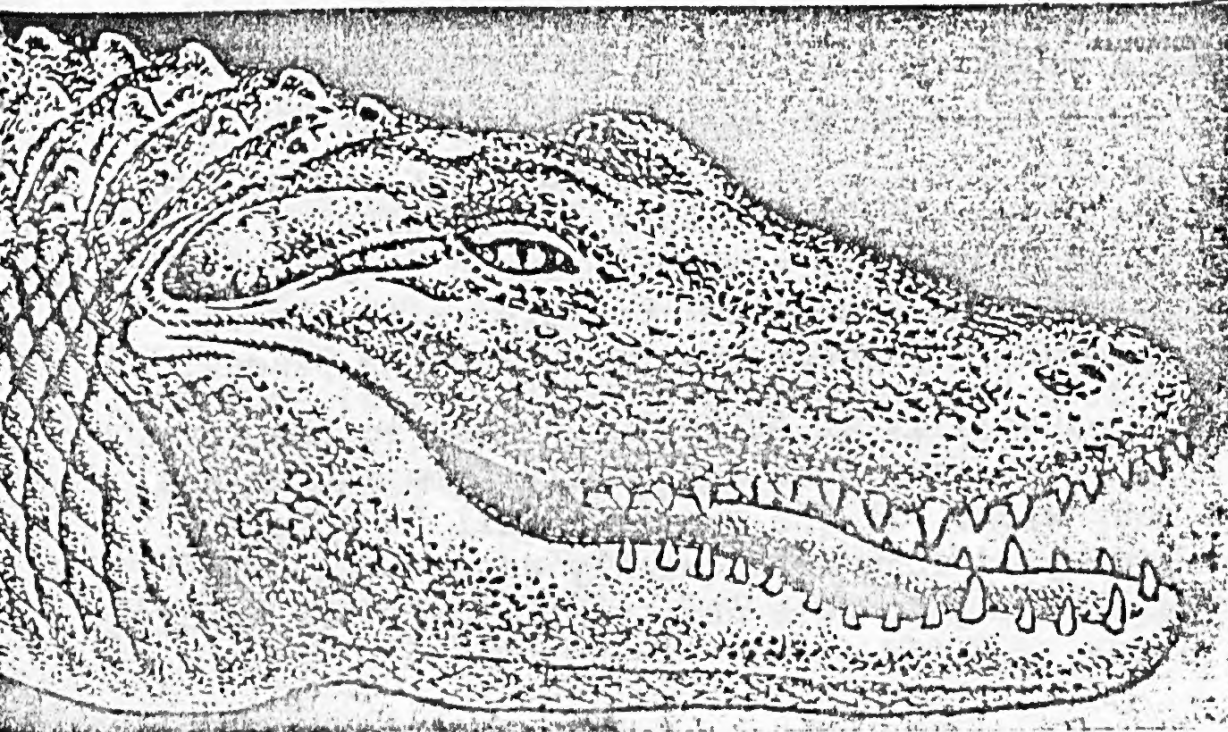
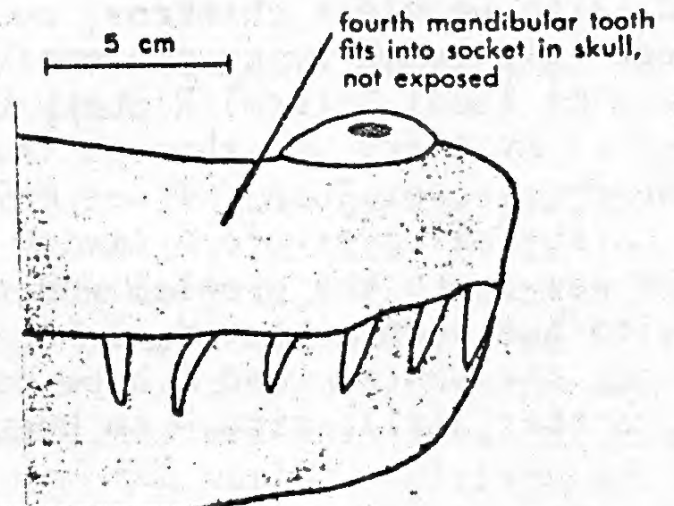
The order of Crocodilia is thought to have been in existence for some 200 million years but now only four groups remain. The Alligator found only in North America and China is blunt nosed. South America has Caimans and the Indian sub-continent is home to the long-nosed Ghavial. Our two species consist of the the Saltwater or Estuarine Crocodile and the Johnstone Crocodile. Of the two the Estuarine is the potential man-killer with a bad reputation of taking anything, right up to large buffalo, while the Johnstone, an inhabitant of rivers and freshwater lakes feeds primarily on fish and larger prey as birds and flying foxes. There are unconfirmed reports of it taking dogs and wild pigs.

The Johnstone is retiring and timid and poses no threat to man, although the odd specimen may reach four metres, instead of the usual two metres. It will however attack if trapped and in captivity turns extremely vicious. The breeding season is at the end of the dry season and Old Bushmen say that when the Johnstone breeds, the wet will begin in six weeks. The nest is about 30cm deep and is dug on a sand bank in which the female will lay about two dozen hard-shelled eggs. The young hatch eight weeks later. The female stays in the area, returning periodically to ensure that all is well. The eggs are in constant danger from predation from Goannas and wild pigs. Once hatched, and on the surface the young scramble for the water where the mother protects them for some time; sheltering among roots and lily pads. Initially the young eat insects before taking to tadpoles. They still suffer from attacks by fish, water snakes, sea eagles and other crocodiles. Although nearly wiped out by hunters for their skins; in 1973 a new fauna act by the Federal and Queensland Governments saved the day and now their population is stable.

The Estuarine Crocodile is one of the largest, its length is normally between 3 to 5 metres but huge individuals have been shot in Australia axceeding 9 metres. Although called a Saltwater crocodile it is quite at home in freshwater lagoons, swamps and rivers. The female builds a nest on a site where is no chance of it being swept away by tides or floods. The nest is concealed in thick vegetation and more often than not is fully exposed to the sun. The nest is up to 3 m in diameter with a depth of 50 to 100 cm. using leaves, branches and grass. Some 30 to 50 eggs are laid and part of the nest is heaped over them. The vegetation slowly decomposes producing the warmth necessary. Normal incubation takes $2\frac{1}{2}$ months, with the female often returning to check the nest. After hatching, the young feed on fish before graduating to wallabies, wild pigs, and then anything larger that comes their way. Even man makes a nice meal. The only enemy lies in the deep estuaries and the open sea - the shark.



Freshwater Crocodile
Crocodylus johnstoni



Alligator

A SAD AND HAPPY STORY FROM GUILDFORD

by Beri Perry

The night of June 18 was cold and frosty at Guildford, and when I was woken by a commotion in the chook shed, I was torn between curiosity and my warm bed. Curiosity won, and the beam from my torch revealed bantams and chickens huddled in all corners of the yard looking most apprehensive. Further searching revealed a little grey furry animal clinging upside down to a rafter in the shed. It was about the size of a large rat, and rather like my brush-tailed possum before she was fully grown, but with a pointier nose, and a tail rather like an angry bottle-brush. While I was thinking what to do, (quite some time), I kept the torchlight on it and was able to get a really good look. I realised that bare hands were not ideal for trying to catch such an animal, so I left to get gardening gloves and a broom to help it out.

When I returned it was outside on the roof anyway, so I settled the ladies as best I could and went back to bed. Morning inspection revealed three headless chickens, so obviously the animal had not really been frightened by my presence. Not having a reference book handy I rang my local Natural History Oracle, Alan Hartup, who told me, even before my story was through that the culprit was a Brush-tailed Phascogale, or Tuan. I was delighted to know we had this native animal a marsupial carnivore - living here, but also sad for my chickens. The answer to the problem was to Phascogale-proof the chicken-house, which has been achieved, I hope. Anyway we have had no more casualties among the bantams and I hope our Tuan is finding enough natural food, or better still, mice - to keep it living happily here.

SUPERSTITIONS No 3.

WILLOW : Willows are connected with sadness and grief. At one time it was spiteful custom to send a piece of willow to a girl whose boyfriend had married someone else. Willow catkins are unlucky if brought indoors but it is lucky to give a willow branch to a special friend on May Day morning. In the sixteenth Century willows were thought to be good for rheumatism because they grew in damp places.

SWALLOW : A lucky bird especially if it builds a nest in the eaves of your house. It will protect your home and family from storms and fire and bring luck in many ways. If the swallows fail to return to their nest one year your good luck will quickly desert you. To tamper with their nest will bring trouble and to kill one will bring extreme bad luck.

THE MONTH OF JUNE AT CAMPBELLS CREEK

from Terry

A very dull month, although the bird life is similar to last month; the exception being the Rosellas who now visit infrequently because all Autumn berries have been devoured. Should have planted more Cotoneasters just for them.,

Still the appearance of a new bird never seen around our neck of the woods before caused some excitement. It sat on a railing outside the kitchen and being considerate, allowed time to get all the bird books out for identification. So for the first time in 15 years a Jacky Winter graced our domain.

Now the upsetting arrivals. Four or five town sparrows have flown in to cause a nuisance to the wrens and others around the food table. So dear friends until next month I shall have to bring out my human cunning and devise means to send sparrows back where they belong.

(Where does he mean exactly ?)

Weed Spread via Bird Seed

FROM Watsonia Journal and Proceedings of the Botanical Society of the British Isles. Vol 15. Part 3 Feb.1985

Large quantities of seed are imported into Britain by the petfood industry as food for cage birds. This ultimately results in the appearance of many species of plants growing in Britain as casuals on rubbish tips or waste ground and in gardens. Some 30 species of plants are regularly introduced as bird food and these, together with their impurities, regularly appear as bird seed aliens. These plants originate widely from many countries around the world. Cultivation of bird seed samples from many sources and the records of plants occurring as bird seed aliens have produced a list of 438 species of plants believed to be introduced by this agency.

From the Editor's Desk

I hope most of my readers are able to get and see more than I have been able to of late. Thank goodness for the Spinebills - always present in the garden to cheer one up. A fleeting visit the other day from some Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, and another rare visitor - a Willy Wagtail, frequently to be seen just down the street but hardly ever venturing into my garden.

Some spectacular flocks of birds about at present. There is the usual flock of Galahs hanging around the High-School area, and another quite large group of Pied Currawongs in the same area. One Saturday morning

recently they were so busy working the turf behind the gym.

Returning from Warrnambool recently along the Hamilton Highway, I was struck by the number of Black-shouldered Kites hovering at intervals along the road. Other members have reported similar sightings and we wondered whether the recent abundance of mice has led to the increase in their numbers, as last time there was a mouse plague, large numbers of kites were seen around Castlemaine. The regular spacing led me to wonder whether they defend a territory. Any ideas?

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

Visitors are invited to attend the Club's sessions.
Excursions leave promptly at the times shown

Fri 12 July DR E. PETERS - POND LIFE

Sat 13 July ABORIGINAL WELLS. Leader is A. Perry (Creswick F.N.C.). All day excursion. Leave SEC, Mostyn St. at 10.30 or meet at Clunes Post Office at 11.30

Fri 9 Aug ROADSIDE TREES. We have ordered a Bird Observer Slide/tape set. Bring your slides of roadside vegetation.

Sat 10 Aug NUGGETTY RANGES. 1.30 from SEC, Mostyn Street.

Aug 30-31, Sept 1 AXEDALE -W.V.F.N.C.A campout.

Sept 13-15 MELVILLE CAVES Campout arranged with Ballarat F.N.C.

Fri 11 Oct BIRDS IN CALIFORNIA talk by Dr Pat Bingham.

Sat 12 Oct Excursion to President Jack's Secret Place.

Fri/Sat/Sun 18-20 October? COLAC - W.V.F.N.C.A. Campout.

Sat 9 Nov. Excursion with Bird Observers Club.

Feb 1986. BENDIGO SETTLING PONDS with Maryborough F.N.C.

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Membership fees for 1985 are:-

\$4 Single membership	\$6 Family membership
\$2 Pensioner/student	\$10 Supporting membership